

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1057

INFO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

AMCONSUL SONGKHLA

AMCONSUL UDORN

SECDEF WASHDC

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 3189

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINR, TH

SUBJECT: THAI MINISTER OF DEFENSE - THAWIT SENIWONG NA AYUTTHAYA

REF: A) BANGKOK 3052

B) BANGKOK 3119

1. NAMED MINISTER OF DEFENSE ON FEBRUARY 21, RETIRED ROYAL THAI ARMY DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF GENERAL THAWIT SENIWONG NA AYUTTHAYA REPORTEDLY IS ARMY COMMANDER IN CHIEF KRIT SIWARA'S CHOICE FOR THE JOB AND WILL PROBABLY BE LITTLE MORE THAN A STAND IN FOR KRIT. AT A RECENT SOCIAL EVENT, THAWIT TOLD AN AMERICAN OFFICER THAT HE DOES NOT WANT THE JOB AND THAT HE WOULD RATHER CONTINUE PLAYING GOLF EVERYDAY AS HE HAS SINCE HIS RETIREMENT IN OCTOBER 1974. WHILE THAWIT IS NOT AN IDEAL SOLDIER BY ANYONE'S STANDARDS OR A PARTICULARLY GOOD OFFICER, ISE APPOINTMENT IS LIKELY TO BE POPULAR WITH THE THAI MILITARY SINCE HE IS CLOSE TO CURRENT AND RECENT RTA TOP LEVEL OFFICERS, INCLUDING BOTH KRIT AND FORMER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN.

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HE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLY YOUNGER THAN HIS 75 YEAR OLD PREDECESSOR,

GENERAL KHRUAN SUTTHANIN, WHOSE ADVANCED AGE AND DISINTEREST IN SUBSTANTIVE MILITARY MATTERS TROUBLED YOUNGER RTA OFFICERS. HIS APPOINTMENT IS LIKELY TO SOOTHE SOME OF THE BRUISED FEELINGS THE MILITARY HAS HAD SINCE THE OUSTER OF THANOM AND PRAPHAT THE BEGINNING OF CIVILIAN RULE IN OCTOBER 1973.

2. THAWIT HAS NO RECORD OF EXCESSIVE CORRUPTION OR POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT. HE IS A GOOD FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES, COOPERATES READILY AND IS FRANK WITH MISSION OFFICIALS, AND HAS SUPPORTED THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND IN THAILAND. ASKED ON FEBRUARY 19 WHETHER U.S. FORCES SHOULD BE WITHDRAWN FROM THAILAND, THAWIT REPLIED, "WE SHOULD NOT KICK THEM OUT AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN HERE TO SERVE OUR PURPOSE. THE AMERICANS HAVE BEEN USEFUL TO US BECAUSE OF THE UNCERTAIN SITUATION IN NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES. THESE DAYS MORE THAN EVER WE NEED ALLIES." (REF. B) THAWIT IS INTELLIGENT AND MAKES DECISIONS SWIFTLY ON CRITICAL PROBLEMS, BUT HE IS NOT KNOWN FOR ORIGINAL OR BOLD IDEAS. A LONER, HE DOES NOT DELEGATE AUTHORITY WELL AND SPENDS TOO MUCH TIME ON DETAILS. HE IS AFRAID OF MAKING MISTAKES.

3. EARLY LIFE AND CAREER: THAWIT WAS BORN IN BANGKOK ON 12 JANUARY 1913. HE ATTENDED THE ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY FROM 1929 UNTIL 1933 AND WAS A CALSSMATE OF PRAPHAT CHARUSATHIAN. HE HAS ALSO ATTENDED THE THAI ARMY ARTILLERY SCHOOL (1953), THE RTA WAR COLLEGE (1959), THE U.S. ARMY AIR DEFENSE SCHOOL AT FT. FLISS (1960), AND THE THAI NATIONAL DEFENSE COLLEGE (1962). HE HAS SERVED AS COMMANDER OF THE AAA DEVISION (1957-62). COMMANDER OF THE LOPBURI MILITARY DISTRICT (1962-63), RTA CHIEF OF ORDNANCE (1963-72), RTA ASSISTANT COMMANDER IN CHIEF (1972-73), AND RTA DEPUTY COMMANDER IN CHIEF UNDER KRIT UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN OCTOBER 1974. HE SERVED IN THREE APPOINTED LEGISLATIVE BODIES: THE 1968-71 SENATE, THE 1972-73 PARLIAMENT, AND FROM JULY 1974 UNTIL 1975 IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

4. PERSONAL INFORMATION AND FAMILY: THAWIT'S WIFE IS NAMED LAMUN. SHE NEVER ATTENDS SOCIAL FUNCTIONS AND DOES NOT SPEAK ENGLISH. THEY HAVE EIGHT GROWN CHILDREN. HE NEITHER DRINKS NOR SMOKES, BUT ENJOYS TENNIS, SOCCER, AND PARTICULARLY CONFIDENTIAL

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GOLF. HE HAS VISITED THE UNITED STATES AT LEAST TWICE (1960 AND 1965). HE SPEAKS POOR ENGLISH, BUT CAN UNDERSTAND IT TO A LIMITED EXTENT IF IT IS SPOKEN SLOWLY. BECAUSE OF HIS PROBLEM WITH ENGLISH, HE SOMETIMES APPEARS RETICENT WITH AMERICANS, BUT HE WARMS UP AND COMMUNICATES READILY WITH THOSE WHO SPEAK THAI. HIS NAME IS OFTEN PHONETICIZED "TAVIT SENIVONGS NA AYUTHYA" AND IS PRONOUNCED "TAH-WIT." KINTNER

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